

DOE attempted to quantify a range of uncertainties associated with mathematical models and input data, and estimated the potential effect these uncertainties could have on collective human health impacts. By summing the uncertainties discussed in Sections K.4.1, K.4.2, and K.4.3 where appropriate, DOE estimates that total collective impacts over 10,000 years could have been underestimated by as much as 3 or 4 orders of magnitude. However, because there are large uncertainties in the models used for quantifying the relationship between low doses (that is, less than 10 rem) and the accompanying health impacts, especially under conditions in which the majority of the populations would be exposed at a very low dose rate, the actual collective impact could be small.

On the other hand, impacts to individuals (human intruders) who could move to the storage sites and live close to the degraded facilities could be severe. During the early period (200 to 400 years after the assumed loss of institutional control), acute exposures to external radiation from the spent nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste material could result in prompt fatalities. In addition, after a few thousand years onsite shallow aquifers could be contaminated to such a degree that consumption of water from these aquifers could result in severe adverse health effects, including premature death. Uncertainties related to these localized impacts are related primarily to the inability to predict accurately how many individuals could be affected at each of the 77 sites over the 10,000-year analysis period. In addition, the uncertainties associated with localized impacts would exist for potential consequences resulting from disruptive events, both manmade and natural.

Therefore, as listed in Table K-15, uncertainties resulting from future changes in natural phenomena and human behavior that cannot be predicted, process model uncertainties, and dose-effect relationships, taken together, could produce the results presented in Section K.3, overestimating or underestimating the impacts by as much as several orders of magnitude. Uncertainties of this magnitude are typical of predictions of the outcome of complex physical and biological phenomena over long periods. However, these predictions (with their uncertainties) are valuable to the decisionmaking process because they provide insight based on the best information available.

REFERENCES

Note: In an effort to ensure consistency among Yucca Mountain Project documents, DOE has altered the format of the references and some of the citations in the text in this Final EIS from those in the Draft EIS. The following list contains notes where applicable for references cited differently in the Draft EIS.

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